

“The Mystery of Lawlessness”

By Rhyd Wildermuth



“Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you?”

And you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed.

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false, so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned.”

—Paul, to the Thessalonians

I. “Doleful Groans, ejaculated by the Roasting Children of Men”

Christianity in the United States has always had a peculiarly eschatological aesthetic, one which—for Christians living in the “old world” of Europe—can often seem, at best, perplexing. Excepting the diminishing “mainstream” denominations, whose numbers have dwindled to so few that they’re rarely even remembered to exist, worship of the one-god in America is primarily defined by anticipation of the lord’s always-imminent return.

When I was a teenager living far from America’s coastal, “secular” cities, the end-times was everywhere. Cars plastered with bumper stickers attesting to Jesus’s imminent return were impossible to avoid, while large billboards on the side of highways—sandwiched between advertisements for McDonald’s and toll-free numbers for sketchy injury lawyers—urged the faithless to convert before it was too late.

Though you might be inclined to dismiss such vapid expressions as merely rural or pop-theology, they represent only one manifestation of a much larger belief written into America’s very founding. The early colonial set-

tlements of New England were led by Puritan and other Protestant governors and preachers, certain they were living on the edge the apocalypse. Just past their low pike walls, hordes of barbaric Pagans ruled by the Devil himself watched from the shadows of the forest, both hateful and jealous of the light of Christ the faithful kindled in those muddy settlements.

Narrating their colonial presence as a final bastion against a present darkness, the founders of the nascent American empire added to their spell of national creation the Apocalyptic “Revelations” of the nymph-tormented hermit, John of Patmos. The colonies were the New Jerusalem, the city of God beset on all sides by the powers of darkness and the armies of sin. Though fornicators, homosexuals, idolators, and especially witches clamoured at the gates, Christ’s promised return was now even closer—and accelerating—with each new church raised with wood from the felled forests of Satan.

The very Devotions of those forlorn Pagans, to whom the Devil is a Leader, are most bloody Penances; and what Woes indeed must we expect from such a Devil of a Moloch, as relishes no Sacrifices like those of Humane Heart-blood, and unto whom there is no Musick like the bitter, dying, doleful Groans, ejaculated by the Roasting Children of Men.

Furthermore, the servile, abject, needy circumstances wherein the Devil keeps the Slaves, that are under his more sensible Vassalage, do suggest unto us, how woful the Devil would render all our Lives. We that live in a Province, which affords unto us all that may be necessary or comfortable for us, found the Province fill’d with vast Herds of Savages, that never saw so much as a Knife, or a Nail, or a Board, or a Grain of Salt, in all their Days.

—Cotton Mather, Wonders of the Invisible World

You don’t shake off such a legacy with science or political liberalism, nor can you undo such a spell without also undoing what the spell created. “America is a Christian nation” sounds like mere political rhetoric, but the United States holds the best historical claim to such a statement. No nation in Europe can make this same claim, because no other was founded through such explicit political theology. Thus, modern political movements which claim to be returning America to its original Godly purpose—such as Dominionism or Christian Identity—have more claim to historical continuity than any secularist formation. As terrifying as their ideological conclusions might be for people such as myself—a gay, polytheist Druid—they’re correct at least in what the US has always stood for—and against.



II. Divine Right and the Wars of Religion

While the United States of America can most accurately be called a Christian nation, the very idea of the nation-state was itself a Christian form of political organization. Dreamt up as response to crisis and instability caused by religious wars, the nation-state arose as a solution to the eroding idea of sovereign power, the sudden weakness of kings and governors, the nation-state was most of all a bulwark against the greatest threat to Christian civilization: *demonic magic*.

All this might sound absurd, so let's go back a few hundred years. Not to the 1600's and to Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who are too often given much of the credit for the theoretical framework of the modern nation-state. Go further back still, 85 years before *Leviathan* was published and more than one hundred years before Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*. There, in 1576, an aging Carmelite friar, the demonologist Jean Bodin, released his *Six Livres De La République*.

Written after the widespread massacres associated with St. Bartholomew's day, in which thousands of radicalized French Calvinists—called Huguenots—were killed by mobs of Catholic faithful, Bodin's *Six Livres* laid out a framework for territorial and earthly sovereignty independent of earlier notions of "Divine Right." Since Charlemagne's rule, European monarchs had relied upon sanction and authority from the Catholic popes to justify their rule over other nobles, the infant bourgeois class, and the peasants. Kings ruled because they were installed upon their thrones by God, a fact either tacitly or officially verified by Christ's vicar on earth in Rome.

Divine Right is a rather misunderstood idea in modern discussions. We tend to think of it as something medieval kings merely fabricated out of thin air or political expediency to justify their rule and existence. For us now, it seems only a political and theological fiction conjured to keep rebellious peasants in line and stifle their desire for democratic representation. As with much else from our modern lens, this view treats Divine Right as a primitive relic of a superstitious past, rather than what is actually was: a peculiar formation of a necessary human need to justify political authority and sovereignty through *sacred fiat*.

Divine Right, in fact, was a mere continuation of something humans have always done, at least as long as we've had rulers. Though they each were part of fully-different cultures, the spirits and ancestors of animist peoples, the land and water goddesses of the Celt and Germans, the imperial gods of Rome, and the God of medieval Christianity were all guarantors of earthly power within their respective cosmologies. The "divine" in each case, however, hardly acted as a rubber-stamp upon the actions of the kings who derived right-to-rule from them. One need only gaze briefly upon the bog-preserved corpses of kings—nipples cut violently from their chests—to see what became of Irish kings and chieftains whose gods no longer supported their rule. We can easily read in scriptures and histories what became of kings and dynastic lines when the Hebrew's god or the Greeks' gods became displeased. Startling accounts collected in anthropological works—such as Sahlins' and Graeber's *On Kings*—fill out for us the way such divine arrangements played and play out within animist cultures.

In other words, Divine Right was hardly a unique political-theological institution, but rather just one form of a crucial cosmological arrangement existing in every relationship of ruler and ruled that humans have ever known. Of course, and again because of our modern lens, we are tempted to see democracy, republics, and the nation-state as final breaks from these arrangements, but that's demonstrably false. What are the "social contract," the "consent of the governed," the "public mandate," and the "majority rule" except particular reconfigurations of these divine sovereignty models? The People, the Electorate, the Citizens—those who guarantee the authority of presidents, parliaments, courts, and bureaucracies, and from whom those forms derive their right-to-rule—are merely a reconfiguration of Divine Right for a different cosmology.

It's in Jean Bodin's *Six Livres* that we see the first steps of this reconfiguration. A well-traveled, deeply researched, and relentlessly curious man, Bodin's previous written works primarily focused on natural philosophy, the precursor to what we now call "science." He's thought to be the first to have identified how monetary inflation occurs, linking the influx of silver from colonial exploitation to the decreasing value of silver and other currencies in Europe. Bodin was also deeply influential on modern understandings of history and progress: his first

published work was essentially a manual for historians, instructing them to include political changes in their narratives of the past.

Jean Bodin lived through the period in France known as *Les Guerres de Religion*, or sometimes the “French Civil War,” thirty-six years of intense political and cultural strife triggered by the ascendancy and later collapse of French Calvinism. It’s estimated that at least 2 million people—and possibly double that—died during those three and a half decades, with casualties distributed on both sides.

Again, through our modern lens, it’s easy to forget that Protestantism (and Calvinism most specifically) was not just a religious movement, but also a political one. In popular histories—especially Anglo-American ones—the Reformation is seen as a struggle for liberation, a mass uprising of democratic desire, peasant rebellion, and resistance to theological authority. In truth, neither Luther nor Calvin cared much for the peasants, even urging Protestant nobles to crush—violently—any movement from below. Nor did either man have any sympathy for democratic rule or anti-clerical sentiment. Instead, the Reformers merely argued that political and religious authority should be in different hands (theirs, and the hands of the nobles they supported), rather than in fewer hands.

The later half of the 1500’s saw quite a propaganda war over the victimhood of Protestants at the hands of Catholics. Most famous of the works published during that period is probably John Foxe’s constantly updated and expanding *Actes and Monuments*, later known as *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*. French compilations abounded as well, including those written and published in Geneva by a close friend of John Calvin, Jean Crespin. Peppered with matter-of-fact references to the demonic pacts and overt sorcery that Catholic bishops, cardinals, and priests supposedly used, such books, especially Crespin’s multi-volume work, *Le Livre des Martyrs*, helped create a new cosmology and a new identity formation for Protestants. The old Church and the old aristocracy was corrupted by the devil; against this moral and dangerous rot arose a new group of righteous, enlightened, and relentlessly victimized believer, ready to die at the hands of Papal “paganism” and Catholic kings.

Against this belief, especially as regards the French Protestants, we should note that Huguenot mobs had a deep fondness for dragging priests, nuns, monks, and lay worshipers out of Catholic churches during masses, raping and dismembering them in front of onlookers. While all this occurred, others in their group smashed statues, windows, and altar pieces inside. Not, of course, that the Catholics were any less violent: they, too, had a preference for slaughtering Huguenots during their worship services.

The bloodiest day of the French Wars of Religion was on 24 August, 1572. Named the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, the events of that day had complicated causes, including Calvinist anger over an attempted assassination of one of their generals, Catholic sense of betrayal over Catherine de Medici’s decision to marry her daughter to a Calvinist, peasant rage over the extreme wealth Huguenot merchants accumulated, and even a miraculously-blooming hawthorn bush in a Paris cemetery. The result, depending of course on who you ask, was either several thousand or 70,000 dead across France. Historical proof for actual numbers is scant, though we know at least 1,100 corpses were washed up from the Seine, and no-one in the cities south of Lyon would drink from or wash with the water of the Rhône for three months because of all the bodies which floated by, out to sea.

It was in this atmosphere, then, that Jean Bodin wrote his work on sovereignty, outlining the beginnings of a cosmological framework in which rulers might be able to continue ruling in the absence of a singular mandate from an agreed-upon God. Calvinism was of particular interest for Bodin—it’s possible he’d met Calvin, or had at least been in Geneva with him, observing a witch trial or even participating in it as a legal advisor. However,



Bodin's sympathy for Calvin seemed to grow ice cold after Calvin ordered the execution of Michael Servetus—burned alive on a fire kindled by his own books—for heresy.

Eight years after that execution, John Calvin called for open revolt and death to rulers who did not obey his new god, asserting they'd already abdicated their throne in their disobedience. The next year, the first massacre of the 36-year long Wars of Religion began, triggering the crisis over Divine Right and sovereignty for which Jean Bodin later wrote his *Six Livres* as a solution.

In response to the disintegrating foundation of royal rule, he proposed a vision of authority derived from observations about natural "order" manifesting in the typical structure of the patriarchal family. Just as the father naturally held authority and power over the wife and children, so, too, does the ruler naturally rule over the people. In Bodin's view, this rule, or sovereignty, derives not from a direct divine mandate but rather the natural order instituted and upheld by the divine. Just as God sat on his throne above all human endeavours because he was God, kings sat on their thrones over the people *because they were kings*. In other words, the sovereignty God and kings possessed was something inseparable from and fully inherent to who they were within the natural order.

To say a king rules because he is king seems merely tautological, perhaps, but Bodin's formulation is the birth of all "modern" forms of sovereignty. Within Divine Right, the sovereignty of the king can be withdrawn by God, just as in animist and pagan conceptions of sovereignty the king or chieftain is destined for death the moment the gods no longer approve. In Bodin's conception, however, it is the natural order which confers upon the ruler his right-to-rule.

It may seem a slight shift, but it served immediately to solve the political threat that Calvinism posed to sovereign rule. Since there were now aggressively competing conceptions of God and who could speak on his behalf, shifting sovereignty away from divine mandate to "natural" mandate mooted the question of who God favored altogether. If sovereignty arises from the natural order—rather than God—than one need only redefine the natural order in order to institute different models of governance. Bodin's shift thus made the idea of the social contract possible. In that framework, the social contract makes *consent to be governed* the natural order which installs the ruler in his rightful place over the people. Thomas Hobbes and John Locke disagreed with each other on what precisely the natural order—or "human nature"—consisted of, but they regardless started from the assumption there was such a thing.



III. Demons and the Birth of the Nation-State

So those who let witches escape or who do not carry out their punishment with utmost rigour, can be assured that they will be abandoned by God to the mercy of witches. And the country which tolerates them will be struck by plagues, famines, and wars—but those who take vengeance against them will be blessed by God, and will bring an end to His wrath.

Jean Bodin: On the Demon-Mania of the Witches

In Jean Bodin, then, we see the very first transition from overt political-theology to a politics which pretends to be secular. But, did you catch the part about him being a demonologist?

While *Six Livres de la République* became the foundation upon which the architects of the modern nation-state built, Bodin's *La Démonomanie des Sorciers*—likely written over the same period during which he wrote *Six Livres*—was his urgent appeal to kings, judges, and other governors to enact his earlier ideas to save Europe from certain destruction. So, while the overt political struggles in France, Germany, and Great Britain seemed to be between Catholics and Protestants, Bodin believed the real war was between the rulers of those lands and the witches who lived there.

It's well-attested that the early years of the Protestant Reformation were also the years which saw the greatest number of witch trials in Europe. Thus, Bodin was hardly the only thinker concerned about such a threat at this time. King James' book *Demonologie* came out 17 years after Bodin's, while three major Protestant texts—*Les Sorciers* (1574) by Lambert Daneau, and Johann Weyer's *De Praestigiis Daemonum et Incantationibus ac Venificiis* (1563) and *Pseudomonarchia Daemonum* (1577) preceded his.

These Protestant books on witchcraft are of particular interest for Bodin, not as source books but rather as dangerous heretical works. Bodin's contention against those authors was that they misunderstood the mechanism by which witches gained their power. Weyer, in fact, is the origin of the modern idea that belief in spirit contact, animal transformations, and night flights are signs of mental illness, or at least hallucinations. For Weyer—who was Agrippa's former student—supernatural accounts admitted by witches or observed by witnesses should be seen as completely false.

This isn't to say they didn't believe the devil was involved. In fact, the new Protestant idea—which was a deep break with Catholic understanding—was that Satan and his vast army of demons were convincing people they were being transported or otherwise possessed supernatural powers. When a witch healed another person, for example, what actually happened was that a demon performed the act, while making the witch and other observers believe it was the witch, instead.

To understand how much of a change this really is, consider the theological problem inherent in the idea of an all-powerful, all-benevolent god. If you believe such a thing exists, then you have to find some sort of explanation for why he seems to tolerate great evil and rival powers, especially the demonic forces against which his faithful struggle. The Catholic explanation for this situation was informed by the memory of the early Church's re-narration of the countless gods as demons: witches and the pagans were making pacts with supernatural beings as they always had, and those beings possessed great (but not total) power.

For the Protestants, such an answer was insufficient. To them, there was never any re-narration at all, since those gods could never have been gods in the first place. Instead, there was only the all-powerful one-god and his servants. Some of those servants had rebelled and subsequently sought to mislead humans into thinking they were gods. Those beings, the fallen angels, only had the power that God allowed them to have, and such a god would not allow such power to be transferred to humans.

Bodin saw this new Protestant idea to be as dangerous as the demons themselves, warning it would lead rulers to become lax in their prosecution of witches. If those witches were to prevail, no Christian ruler—Protestant or Catholic—would be able to quell the ensuing collapse of social order.



IV. Sovereigns and Demons

We might be inclined to imagine that Bodin lost this argument, since no current industrialized, “secular” democracy prosecutes witches or witchcraft any longer. Meanwhile, mental illness is quite a common state of affairs in our world, merely one symptom in the constellation of human alienation which defines our daily life in modern society.

However, this misses what underlies Bodin’s thinking in both of his books on sovereignty. For him, the ultimate role of the sovereign is to hold together the order mandated and instituted by God, so that the demonic chaos of fallen humanity cannot destroy us. In other words, the sovereign exists to save us from the “natural” state that Hobbes described as “nasty, brutish, and short,” thus our need for the “Leviathan,” or strong authority. Locke argued for a slightly better view of human nature, but nevertheless insisted we needed a strong sovereign because we could not resolve conflict or competing interests on our own.

In the next century, we see this fear of ungoverned humans in Cotton Mather’s demonological work, *The Wonders of the Invisible World*. For Mather, the indigenous lands surrounding the faithful on their god-given continent were living proofs of what would happen to all of us if God’s sovereign order were weakened. Barbaric forces would invade the settled lands, tempting those of weak faith into congress with the Devil, and God’s plan for the entire world would be ultimately thwarted.

It wasn’t just the witch-hunters who worried about this danger, however. The architects of the American nation-state held to this same fear, but iterated that fear instead through the new language of democracy and republicanism. Some divine figure would need to bequeath sovereignty to the rulers so they could save the people from demonic chaos, and thus the people themselves—or rather their abstracted will and “consent” as the electorate—was proffered as God’s mouthpiece. Where once Popes, druids, and priests interpreted the will of the

sacred, elections would now become the new auguries. Regardless of how it is dressed up, though, the fear of the demonic chaos still provides the ultimate justification for all modern sovereign rule. Without the sovereign, some great calamity shall befall us, triggering a series of events at whose end is the final days of the Christian order itself.

This was also the belief of Carl Schmitt, the jurist and theorist whose ideas led him first to criticize the Nazi party, then next to embrace it, and then finally—after their defeat—to expand his personal reasoning into a governing framework which now informs every nation-state of the world. It's from Schmitt that we now have an understanding that the political concepts, institutions, and theories which define our modern world are hardly modern at all. Instead, as he notes, they are continuations of (Christian) theological concepts:

All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development - in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent god became the omnipotent lawgiver - but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology. Only by being aware of this analogy can we appreciate the manner in which the philosophical ideas of the state developed in the last centuries.

Schmitt was equally a deep critic of the alienating effects of industrial capitalism upon the life of individuals and communities, and also of liberal theories which proposed human behaviors could be shaped through education or socialism. However, what was most important to him was the maintenance of order (“concrete order,” as he called it) against the ever-present threat of chaotic collapse. Schmitt’s idea of the concrete order of a nation-state is not very different from Jean Bodin’s tautological formula (rulers rule because they are rulers), except that he extended this reflexive idea one step further. *Rulers rule*, Schmitt insisted, *because they were the only ones who could suspend the rule of law*.

This sounds of course like a justification for the worst forms of authoritarianism imaginable, but Carl Schmitt insisted that this was merely an observation about how all nation-states worked, including representative democracies. Presidents or parliaments may be elected to do the will of the people, but even the best of them still have the power to suspend rights and the regular rule of law as they see fit. Such suspensions are supposedly reserved for moments of constitutional or existential crises, “exceptions” with supposed time limits. However, from the moment such an emergency is declared until it is suspended, the declaring body (president, generals, prime ministers; congress, etc) is no different from a dictator.

This is the logic of the “state of emergencies” which we’ve see increasingly declared in the last few decades. In the first decade of this century, the United States declared several such exceptions as part of the War on Terror, and European nation-states quickly followed suit. More recently, of course, was the worldwide orgy of emergencies declared in response to COVID, exceptions which included the suspension of rights of movement, new police powers to verify health status, the seizure of bank accounts of protesters in Canada, the closing of borders

ATTESTATION DE DÉPLACEMENT DÉROGATOIRE
En application de l'article 1^{er} du décret du 16 mars 2020 portant réglementation des déplacements dans le cadre de la lutte contre la propagation du virus Covid-19 :

Je soussigné(e)
Mme / M. _____
Né(e) le : _____
Demeurant : _____

certifie que mon déplacement est lié au motif suivant (cocher la case) autorisé par l'article 1^{er} du décret du 16 mars 2020 portant réglementation des déplacements dans le cadre de la lutte contre la propagation du virus Covid-19 :

☐ déplacements entre le domicile et le lieu d'exercice de l'activité professionnelle, lorsqu'ils sont indispensables à l'exercice d'activités ne pouvant être organisées sous forme de télétravail (sur justificatif permanent) ou déplacements professionnels ne pouvant être différés;

☐ déplacements pour effectuer des achats de première nécessité dans des établissements autorisés (liste sur [gouvernement.fr](https://www.gouvernement.fr));

☐ déplacements pour motif de santé;

☐ déplacements pour motif familial impérieux, pour l'assistance aux personnes vulnérables ou la garde d'enfants;

☐ déplacements brefs, à proximité du domicile, liés à l'activité physique individuelle des personnes, à l'exclusion de toute pratique sportive collective, et aux besoins des animaux de compagnie.

Fait à _____, le ____ / ____ / 2020
(signature)

A French “attestation de déplacement,” a paper French citizens were required to fill out before leaving their house during the harsh lockdowns. Reasons permitted for leaving were limited to doctor visits, going to workplaces that couldn't transition to remote work, taking care of a sick family member, buying necessary groceries at government-approved stores, or going for a very brief walk near your house for exercise or to walk a dog.

(including internal borders) to human movement, curfews, and bizarre paperwork regimes requiring citizens to declare where they're going before leaving the house.

While many who criticized such seizures of power claimed governments were acting “undemocratic,” Schmitt would probably have countered that, “*no, this is exactly how a democratic state must function in order to exist.*” All sovereign powers must be able to suspend rights and laws, to declare exceptions, otherwise they wouldn't be sovereign. It's precisely from that ability to create exceptions that they derive their sovereignty.

This might seem initially to undermine the connection between Bodin's idea of sovereignty and Schmitt's, since Bodin believes sovereignty derives from the natural order. Giorgio Agamben, however, has shown otherwise, pointing out that Schmitt's exception has the sovereign existing as *homo sacer*, the cursed/sacred man who cannot be punished by the state, only by nature. In other words, the sovereign (again, the president, prime minister, parliament, congress, general, dictator, or whatever) is embedded in the natural (God's) order, not in the human one.



V. The Eschaton and the Ratchon

There is an even more important point of agreement between Bodin and Schmitt, and one crucial to the thrust of this essay. Both men believed there was a demonic chaos threatening to trigger the end of the Christian order—and thus the human world itself. Bodin (like Mather and other early American Christian founders) believed it was the witches and the demons who would bring about this apocalypse, but we need only remember what they—and Christians in general—believed would result from that apocalypse (unveiling) to see what Schmitt was worried about.

Christianity is not just based upon a belief in human salvation and resurrection, but also a fanatical obsession with the imminent destruction of the world. In fact, in order for the promised resurrection to occur, the world

as we know it must end in mass slaughter, demon-led wars, plague, famines, and all manner of other calamities. Then, the earth will be consumed in fire, burned up completely, and finally remade by the God who destroyed it.

At some point, then, the “city on a hill,” the heavenly city of the faithful—the Christian order itself—will be destroyed. Not just will be, but also *must be*, because the promised bodily resurrection of the faithful and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth cannot happen until this world is destroyed.

The consequence of this apocalyptic trigger—without which Jesus cannot return and God cannot fulfill his plan—is that the human state exists in an apparently contradictory position. On the one hand, it is there to serve God and protect the faithful from the demonic chaos; on the other hand, by doing so it is staving off, delaying, or even restraining the promised end-times, the eschaton.

This “restraining” role of the nation-state is spoken of in Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians, which I quoted at the beginning of this essay. In it, Paul warns the faithful not to act as if the end-times are already here, because the necessary trigger for Christ’s return, the arrival of the “lawless one,” has not yet come. In fact, the lawless one *cannot* yet come, because there is a power restraining him:

And you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed.

The Greek word translated as “restrainer” is *katechon*, and it was a particular obsession for Carl Schmitt. He believed the true justification of all sovereign Christian order was to act as the *katechon*, restraining the arrival of the antichrist until God saw it fit to remove it. For him, the first *katechon* was the Roman empire, keeping order in the world and upholding civilization against barbarian pagans long enough for it to be Christianized. Though he did not name subsequent *katechons*, he insisted such a catalogue should be written:

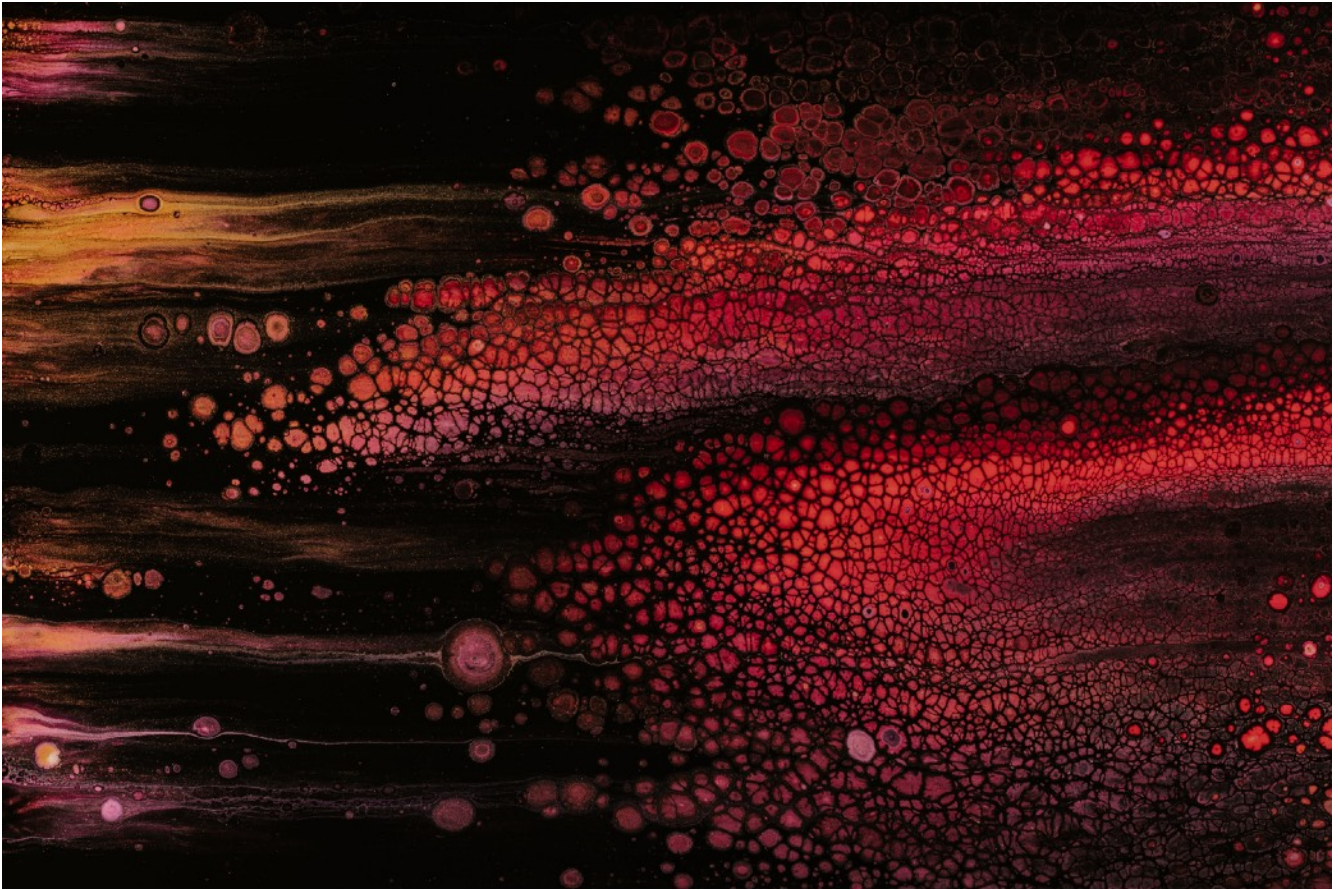
the Katechon needs to be named for every epoch of the past 1948 years. The place was never unoccupied; otherwise we would no longer be present.

The “mystery of lawlessness” is generally identified as the antichrist, though the antichrist is not always seen as a singular person. Bodin’s certainty that witches and demons would bring down the Christian order was an interpretation of the antichrist as a general force of darkness, an interpretation which persists into Thomas Hobbes’s conception of a state of uncivilized and terrifying nature without the Leviathan. Despite all his mystical rhetoric, this was also Cotton Mather’s view, especially in his description of the Devil’s “slaves” living in such uncivilized conditions:

Furthermore, the servile, abject, needy circumstances wherein the Devil keeps the Slaves, that are under his more sensible Vassalage, do suggest unto us, how woful the Devil would render all our Lives. We that live in a Province, which affords unto us all that may be necessary or comfortable for us, found the Province fill’d with vast Herds of Savages, that never saw so much as a Knife, or a Nail, or a Board, or a Grain of Salt, in all their Days.

That is, we would have no civilization, no technology, not so much as a “knife, or a nail, or a board, or a grain of salt,” without the order of God and the sovereigns who restrain the mystery of lawlessness.

This same view dominates all modern political structures now, despite being (usually) stripped of its religious aesthetic. Without the sovereign power of the nation-state, Covid, terrorists, anarchists, fascists, or however the “mystery of lawlessness” is named will return us to a dark state of primitive nature in which we are ruled by demonic impulses and the anti-scientific beliefs of witches. The entire order will collapse without the *katechon*/sovereign, ushering in the eschaton and with it the end of the world.



VI. *The Resurgent Demonic*

There is a tendency on the liberal-left to think that recent excesses of the nation-state are mere aberrations from its true purpose, and that the current turmoil of representative democracy is just a temporary moment of re-orientation. In such a view, technological and social progress will regardless continue the long march into the future, regardless reactionary attempts to delay it.

I've noticed the same tendency from thinkers on the right, especially from what appears to be a resurgent Christian right. They also believe the final destination of the nation-state will be arrived at, after a necessary period of re-orientation. While what's needed according to the liberal-left is more social justice education and a short suppressive war against reactionary and racist elements, the Christian right believes we need more moral education and a short suppressive war against the woke and "pagan (im)morality."

This is manifesting in a peculiar and frightful two-sided Satanic panic in the United States and the United Kingdom. One side is certain the other is racist and fascist, while the other thinks their opponents are all "groomers" or pedophiles. Both sides, though, are really talking about the same thing and operating from the same Christian framework. Demonic forces led by "witches" are threatening to destroy order and civilization, and both appeal to a sovereign which can protect them from the Satanic state of dark nature in which we would all find ourselves without "so much as a *Knife*, or a *Nail*, or a *Board*, or a Grain of *Salt*."

Though they see themselves as enemies of each other, they are more truly twins of each other, separated only in their differing idea of who the "mystery of lawlessness" actually is. Something is at work in the land, undermining the power of the katechon/sovereign and tempting people away from the true faith. Were it to succeed, life as we know it will end in bloody slaughter, plague, and pestilence, and after that the end of the world. In oth-

er words, the Christian eschaton—the end of civilization and then of all life itself—is written into each of these supposedly opposing views.

Here we must remember that the very thing they are trying to stave off is the consequences of the (Christian) order itself. This was Friedrich Nietzsche's point in his book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, which though ostensibly is about aesthetics is really about the necessary balance between the forces of order, morality, and individualism on one hand (the "Apollonian") and the forces of ecstasy, natural desire, and the obliteration of the self (the "Dionysian") on the other.

For Nietzsche, the Dionysian represented exactly the state of uncivilized nature which so terrified Bodin, Mather, Hobbes, Schmitt, and so many other architects of the modern nation state. It was both a brutal and joyous force of existence, dissolving artificial separation between men and between men and nature, a force he named as a true "witches cauldron."

In all quarters of the old world — setting aside here the newer worlds — from Rome to Babylon, we can confirm the existence of Dionysian celebrations... Almost everywhere, the central point of these celebrations consisted of an exuberant sexual promiscuity, whose waves flooded over all established family practices and its traditional laws. The very wildest bestiality of nature was here unleashed, creating that abominable mixture of lust and cruelty, which has always seemed to me the real "witches' cauldron."

... Under the magic of the Dionysian, not only does the bond between man and man lock itself in place once more, but also nature itself, no matter how alienated, hostile, or subjugated, rejoices again in her festival of reconciliation with her prodigal son, man. The earth freely offers up her gifts, and the beasts of prey from the rocks and the desert approach in peace. The wagon of Dionysus is covered with flowers and wreaths; under his yolk stride panthers and tigers.

Nietzsche doesn't see the Dionysian as the only vital force of human existence, however. For him, the Apollonian is just as important. In fact, he argues that the Dionysian will destroy man without the Apollonian structure to which the revellers can return when the ecstatic moment has worn off. Similarly, the Apollonian, which for Nietzsche is not just structure but also morality and individuality, can only sustain itself when the Dionysian gives it life and the potential for release. Without the Dionysian, civilization becomes so fearful of death, of nature, and especially of its own destruction that it collapses upon itself.

Particularly relevant to critiques that modern techno-utopian civilization has crushed the human soul, and also relevant to both right-wing and left-wing fears that a "demonic" mystery of lawlessness is about to sweep the land, Nietzsche asserted that cultures which suppressed or denied the Dionysian would ultimately be destroyed by it:

And now we should not conceal from ourselves what lies hidden in the womb of this Socratic culture! An optimism that thinks itself all powerful! Well, people should not be surprised when the fruits of this optimism ripen, when a society that has been thoroughly leavened with this kind of culture, right down to the lowest levels, gradually trembles with an extravagant turmoil of desires, when the belief in earthly happiness for everyone, when faith in the possibility of such a universal knowledge culture gradually changes into the threatening demand for such an Alexandrian earthly happiness, into the plea for a Euripidean deus ex machina!

People should take note: Alexandrian culture requires a slave class in order to be able to exist over time, but with its optimistic view of existence, it denies the necessity for such a class and thus, when the effect of its beautiful words of seduction and reassurance about the "dignity of human beings" and the "dignity of work" has worn off, it gradually moves towards a horrific destruction. There is nothing more frightening than a barbarian slave class which has learned to think of its existence as an injustice and is preparing to take revenge, not only for itself, but for all generations.

Here it becomes obvious that the katechonic role of the nation-state, the latest iteration of Christian—or better said Apollonian—order, is the "Socratic" or "Alexandrian" culture threatened by the Dionysian desire for

what Agamben called “bare life.” As our technologies and theories separate us ever farther away from nature and each other, the suppressed Dionysian stalks the land more brazenly. The witches’ cauldron is bubbling over, the demons tempt the people away from the prison of urban life into the wilds of forests. The “barbarian slave class,” a requirement for all our technological, industrial advances “moves towards a horrific destruction,” preparing for revenge. All around us, that which restrains is faltering. The mystery of lawlessness is coming, dancing with flowers and wreaths covering his wagon, and under his yoke stride panthers and tigers.

To evoke.

Rhyd Wildermuth



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